

November 2025

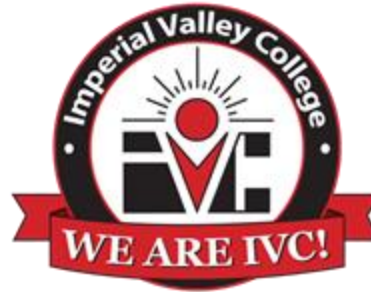
San Diego & Imperial Community Colleges'

ADULT LEARNER STUDY

Insights to Strengthen Practices and Policies



SAN DIEGO & IMPERIAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES



SAN DIEGO & IMPERIAL CENTER OF EXCELLENCE (COE)

A person in a white lab coat is working with laboratory glassware. The image is overlaid with various data visualizations, including a bar chart, a line graph, and a table of numbers.

RESEARCH

A person in a white lab coat is working with laboratory glassware. The image is overlaid with various data visualizations, including a bar chart, a line graph, and a table of numbers.

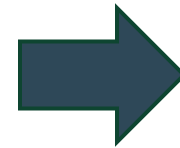
TRAINING

A person in a white lab coat is working with laboratory glassware. The image is overlaid with various data visualizations, including a bar chart, a line graph, and a table of numbers.

ADVOCACY


A person in a white lab coat is working with laboratory glassware. The image is overlaid with various data visualizations, including a bar chart, a line graph, and a table of numbers.

EVALUATION



**Drive change to
meet the needs of
our employers and
students**

AGENDA



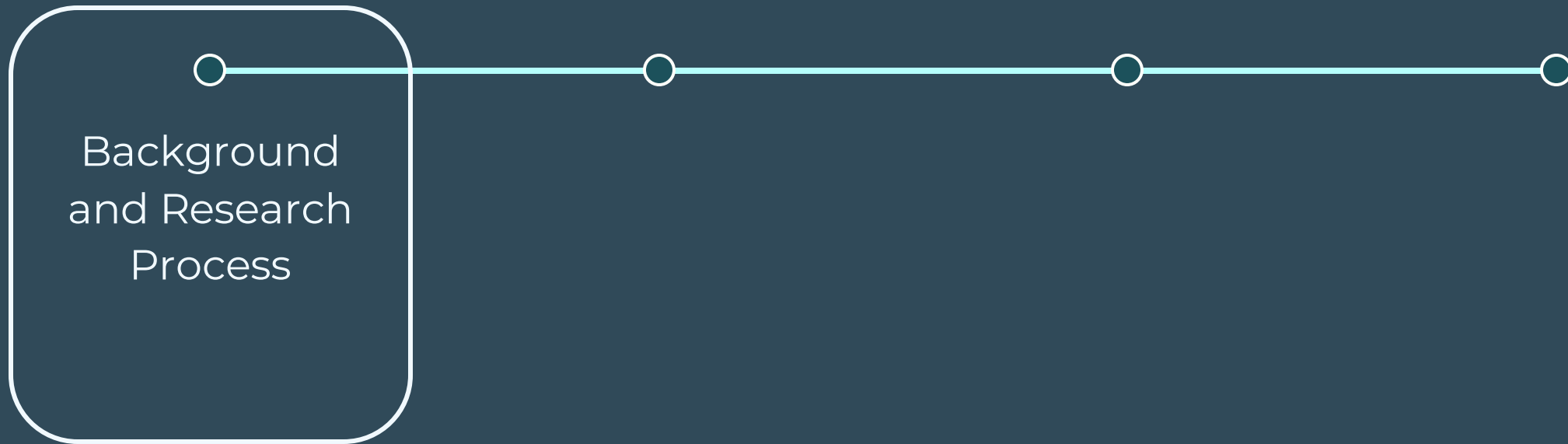
Background
and Research
Process

Overview of
Survey
Respondents

Study Insights,
Reflections and
Recommendations

Panel
Discussion with
Q&A

AGENDA



BACKGROUND: **STATE GOALS**

THE CALIFORNIA BLUEPRINT

VISION 2030

A Roadmap for California
Community Colleges

**70% of working-age Californians will
earn a postsecondary degree by 2030.**

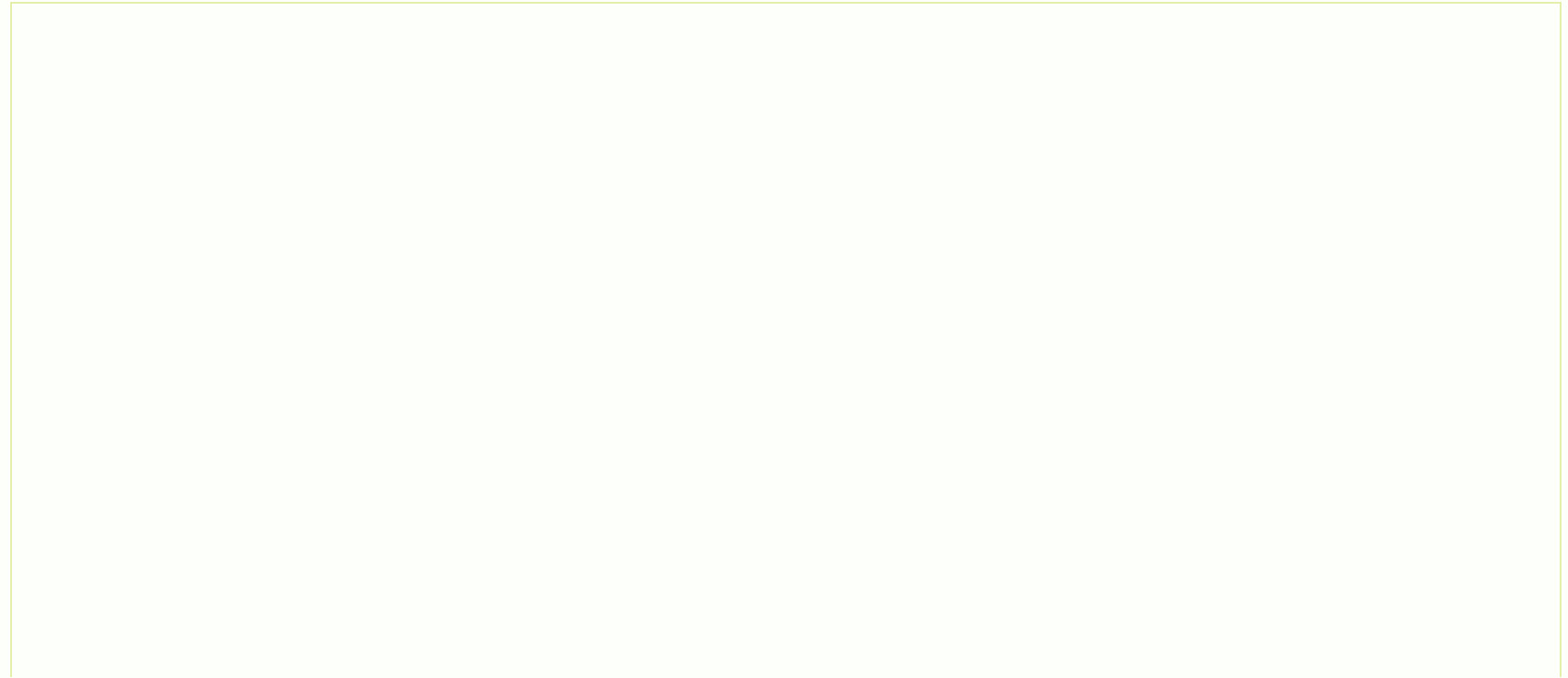
**Adult learners will achieve upward mobility
and improve their quality of life.**

WHO ARE ADULT LEARNERS?

**Students aged 25+ who balance college, work,
caregiving, and other life responsibilities**

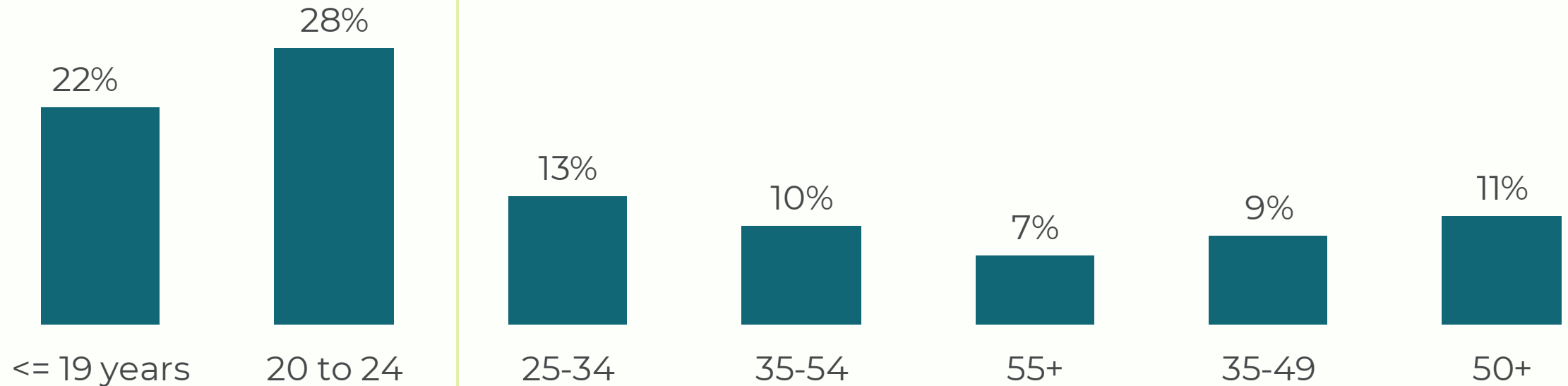
% STUDENT POPULATION BY AGE

San Diego & Imperial Community Colleges



% STUDENT POPULATION BY AGE

San Diego & Imperial Community Colleges



RESEARCH PROCESS

FEB
2025



Formed an
advisory group
for the study

MAR - JUN
2025



Created survey
and obtained
feedback

JUL - AUG
2025



Collected contact
info and survey
responses

SEP - NOV
2025



Analyzed data
and completed
report

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Of the former students who...

- Completed their education:
What helped them achieve their educational objectives?
- Did not complete:
What hindered their progress toward completion?

The study examines adult learners' experiences with our colleges and their...

Goals and motivation to enroll

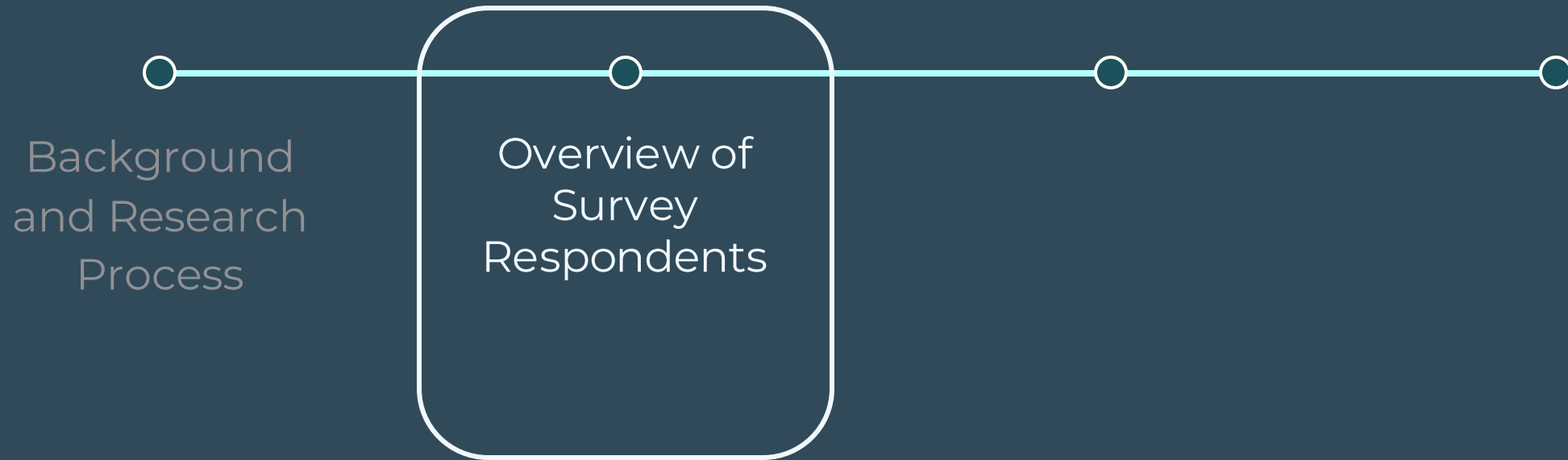
Barriers to persistence

Supports needed to retain

Satisfaction with instruction & services

Employment outcomes

AGENDA



DEMOGRAPHICS

- A total of **621 survey respondents**
- Not all answered demographic questions

Gender	N=557
Woman	73%
Man	24%
Non-Binary / Self-Describe	2%
Age	N=552
25 - 34	40%
35 - 44	26%
45 - 54	17%
55 - 64	13%
65 and above	4%

Race/Ethnicity*	N=542
White	43%
Hispanic or Latinx/o/a/é	37%
Asian or Asian American	15%
Black or African American	10%
Filipino/a/x	3%
Middle Eastern or North African	2%
Other	2%
American Indian or Alaska Native	2%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2%

*Multiple options could be selected.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Special Population*	N=543
First-generation college student	52%
Parent to child(ren) under 18 yrs. old	38%
Low-income resident	24%
Person with disability	21%
Single parent	20%
English language learner	13%
Caregiver for adult(s)	12%
U.S. Veteran or active duty	9%
Dependent for transportation	6%
Homeless individual	4%
Formerly incarcerated	4%
Currently or previously in foster care	2%
None of the above	22%

*Multiple options could be selected.

Education Level	N=562
High school graduate or less	9%
Some college credit, no degree	24%
Associate degree (AA, AS)	18%
Bachelor's degree (BA, BS)	31%
Graduate degree (Master's, Ph.D.)	18%

OF THE 621 SURVEY RESPONDENTS...

COMPLETER

54%

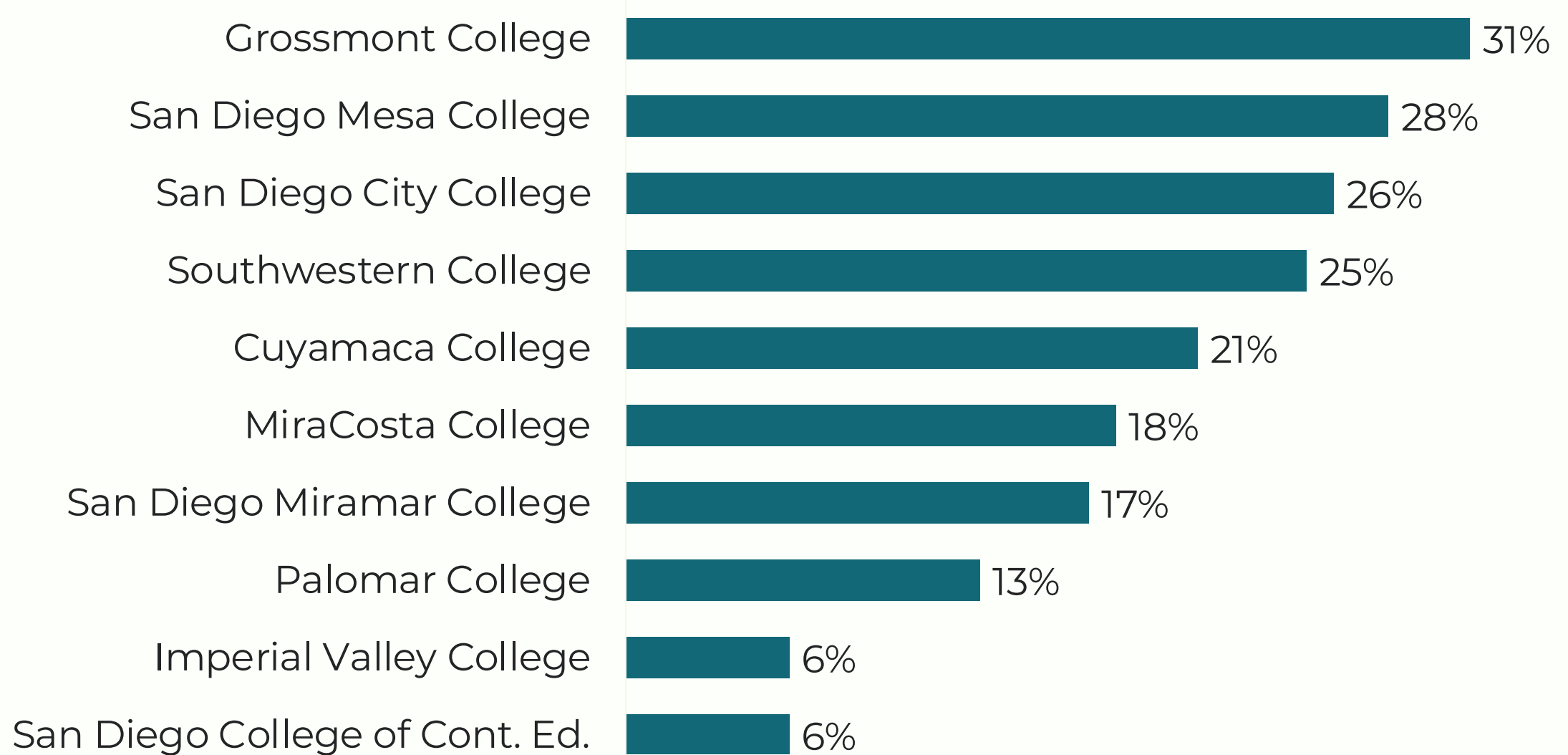
Attended community
college and completed
goals

NON-COMPLETER

46%

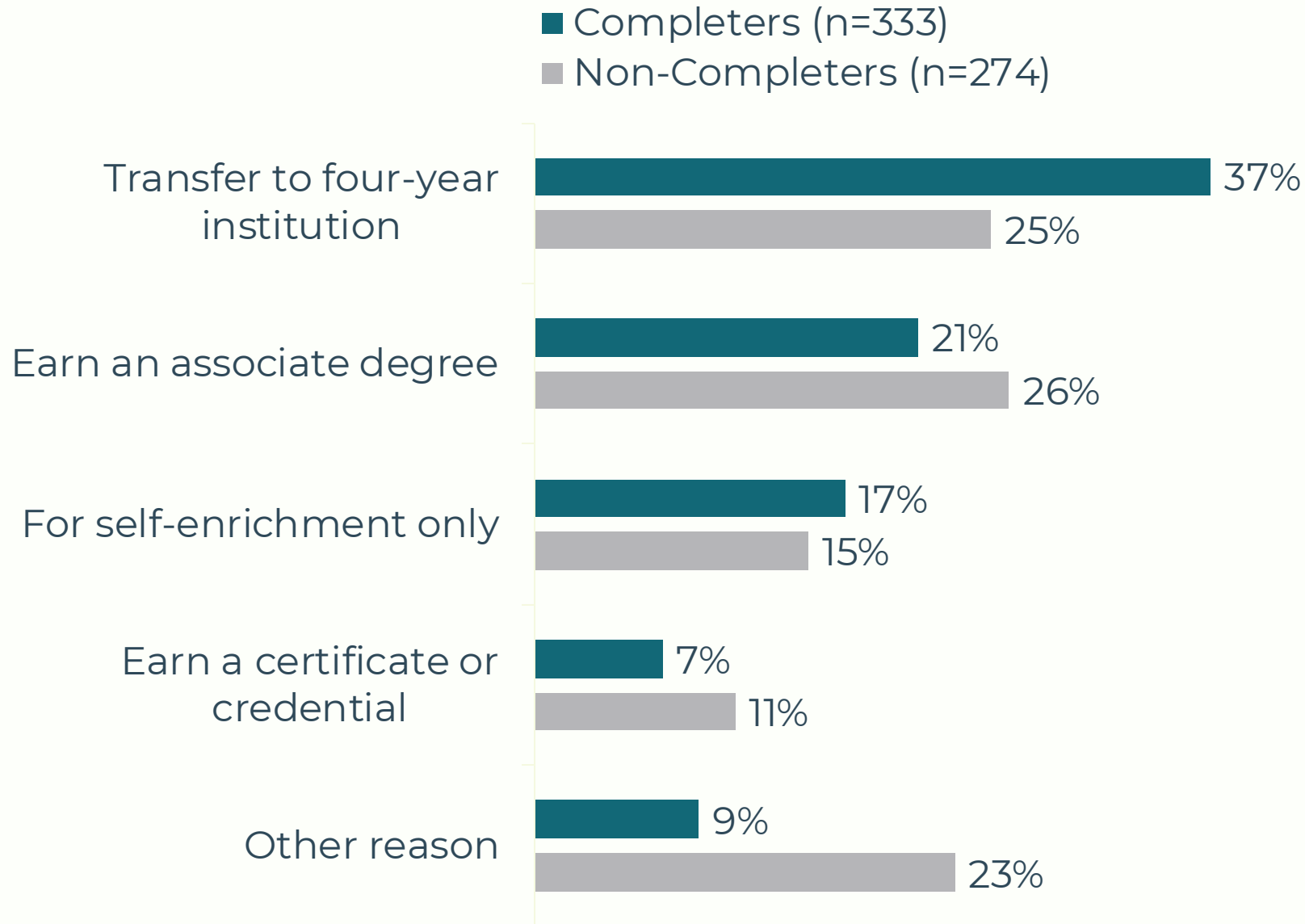
Attended community
college, but did not
complete

50% OF 621 RESPONDENTS ATTENDED MORE THAN 1 COLLEGE



*Multiple options could be selected.

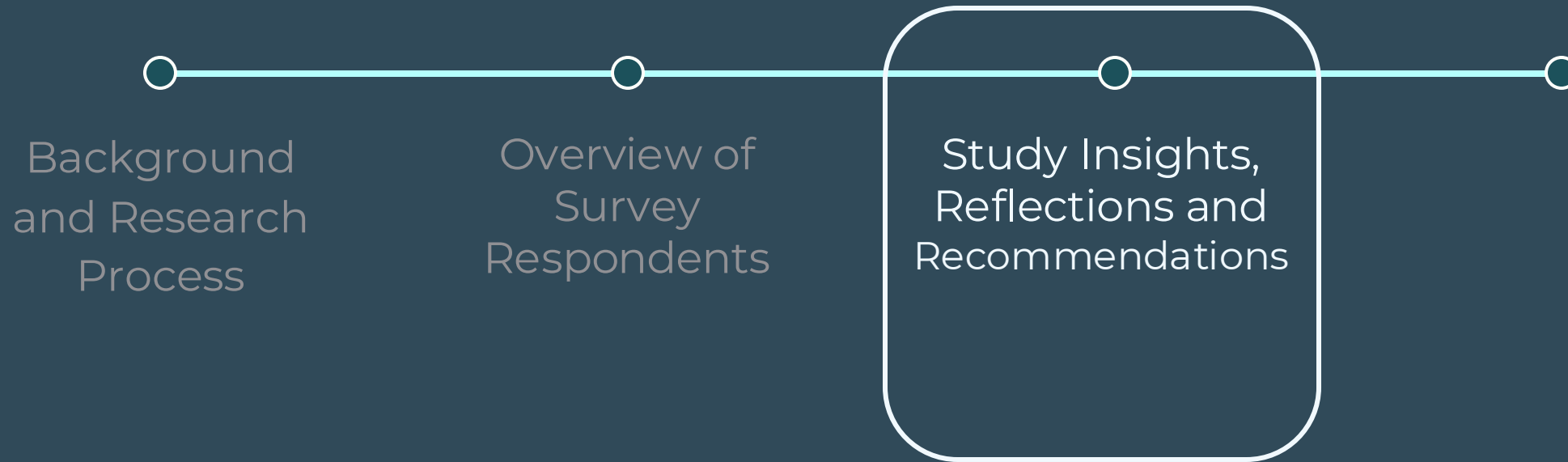
PRIMARY GOALS TO ENROLL



Top goal for...

- **Completers** was to **transfer**
- **Non-completers** was to **earn an associate degree**

AGENDA





Insight #1

Adult learners balance multiple responsibilities—such as working and caregiving—resulting in scheduling conflicts that delay or stop their studies.

TOP REASON FOR PAUSING STUDIES

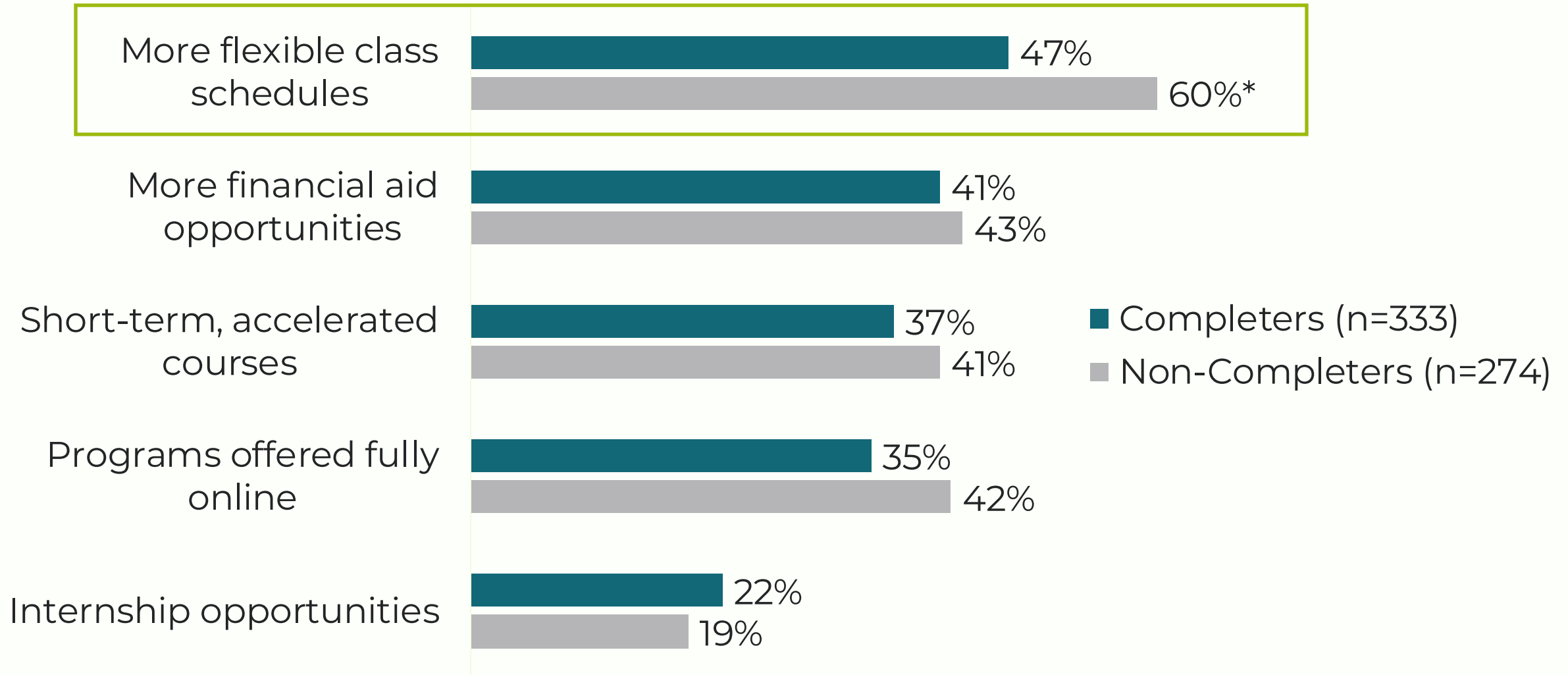
“I appreciated early morning and some evening classes, but [I] think there could’ve been more.”

– Person with Disability, Non-Completer

41%

of non-completers
said their class
schedules conflicted
with their work or
personal
commitments

MOST HELPFUL TO COMPLETE EDUCATIONAL GOALS



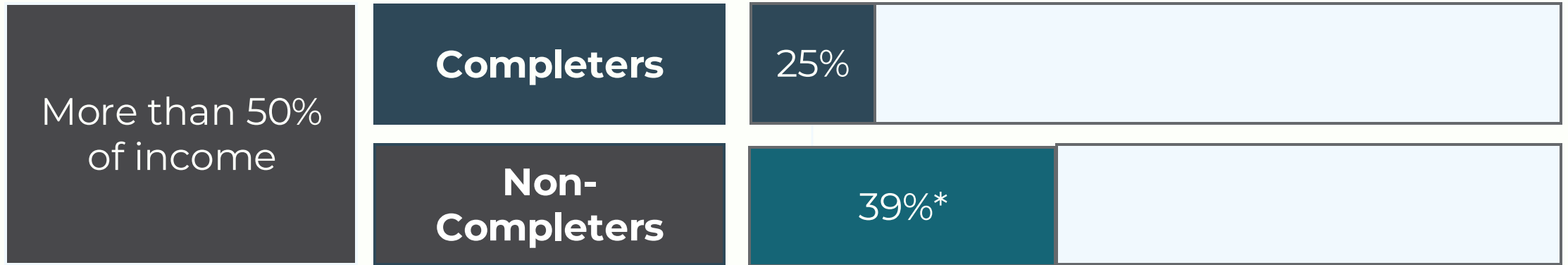
*statistically significant, p-value <.05

NON-COMPLETERS REPORTED HIGHER CAREGIVING HOURS

	Completers (n=326)	Non-Completers (n=264)
Working for pay	26	28
Providing care for dependents	20	27*
Preparing for and attending class	16	17
Commuting to work	6	7
Commuting to school	5	6
Participating in college activities	2	2
Total Average	75 hours	87 hours

*statistically significant, p-value <.05

NON-COMPLETERS SPEND MORE ON HOUSING



*Significantly higher than comparison group, $p < .05$

Housing costs should not
exceed **30%** of income

Average rent in San Diego
County is nearly
\$3,000 per month

RECOMMENDATION

Prioritize flexible scheduling and accessible class formats for adult learners balancing multiple responsibilities

“[The college] allowed me to complete credits on my own time, even with full-time employment and children in the picture. Thanks to the flexibility of the schedule... I was able to steadily complete my transfer courses...”

- BIPOC, English-Language Learner

SIMILAR TO PRIOR STUDIES....

Black Student Equity

Overcoming Barriers and Providing Support

SAN DIEGO-IMPERIAL

MAY 2023

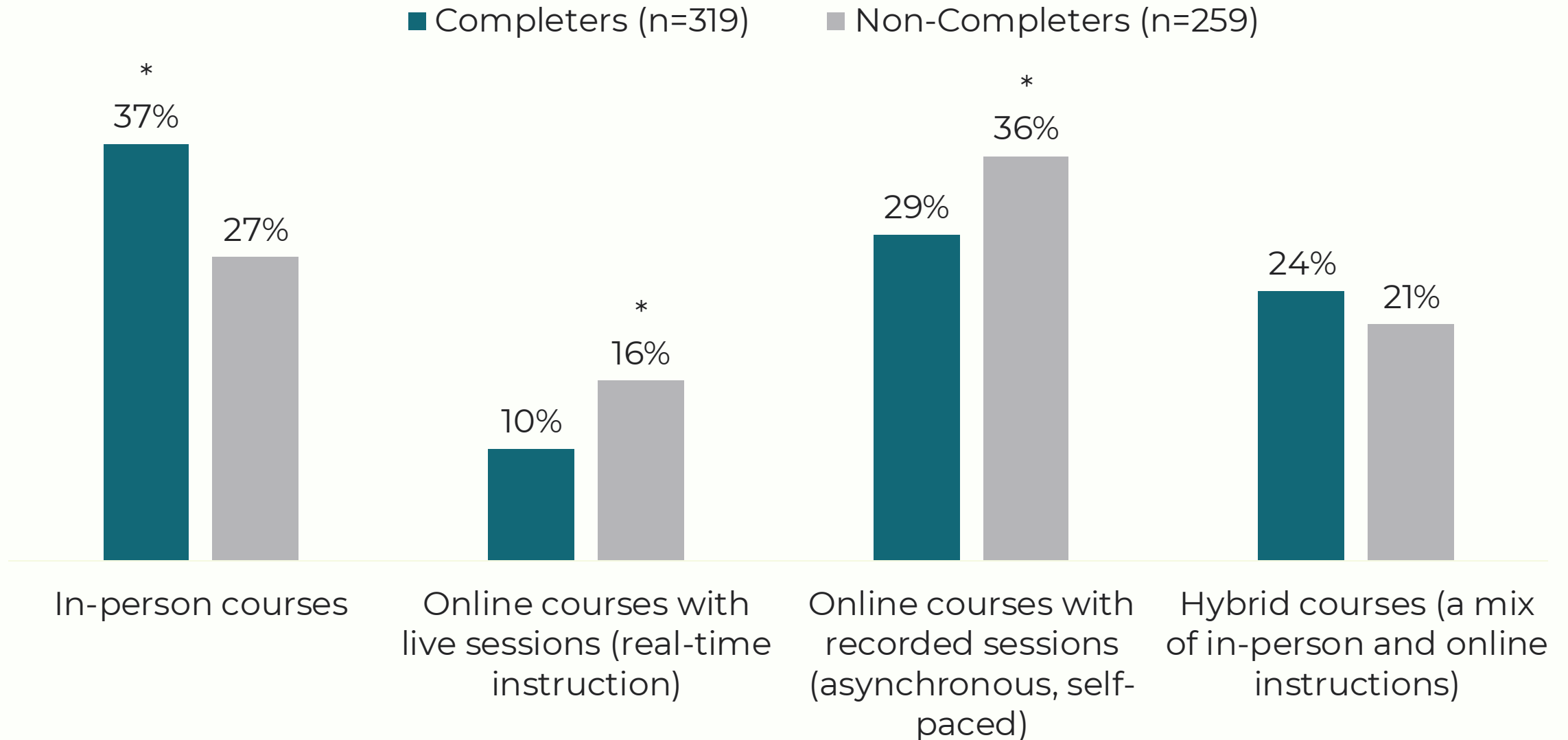


RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Review local Career Ed pathways** and strategic enrollment plans to ensure alignment and flexibility
- **Assess local scheduling practices** to identify gaps in course offerings and develop targeted solutions



67% PREFERRED ONLINE OR HYBRID COURSES



*Significantly higher than comparison group, $p < .05$

RECOMMENDATION

Invest in instructional design support, faculty collaboration, and professional development

Effective online instruction is also important, not just more online courses

“The person providing the online course was not very good at presenting. All they did was talk about the material. I got sick of just listening, where I could have just read the material in my own time.”

- BIPOC, First Generation

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How can the colleges design more flexible instructional formats (e.g., hybrid, evening, weekend) that meet adult learner needs while maintaining academic integrity and faculty support?
- How well do current course schedules and delivery modes align with adults' learner availability?
- Are there required courses where limited online or evening offerings create barriers?
- Are colleges continuously reviewing when key courses are offered?



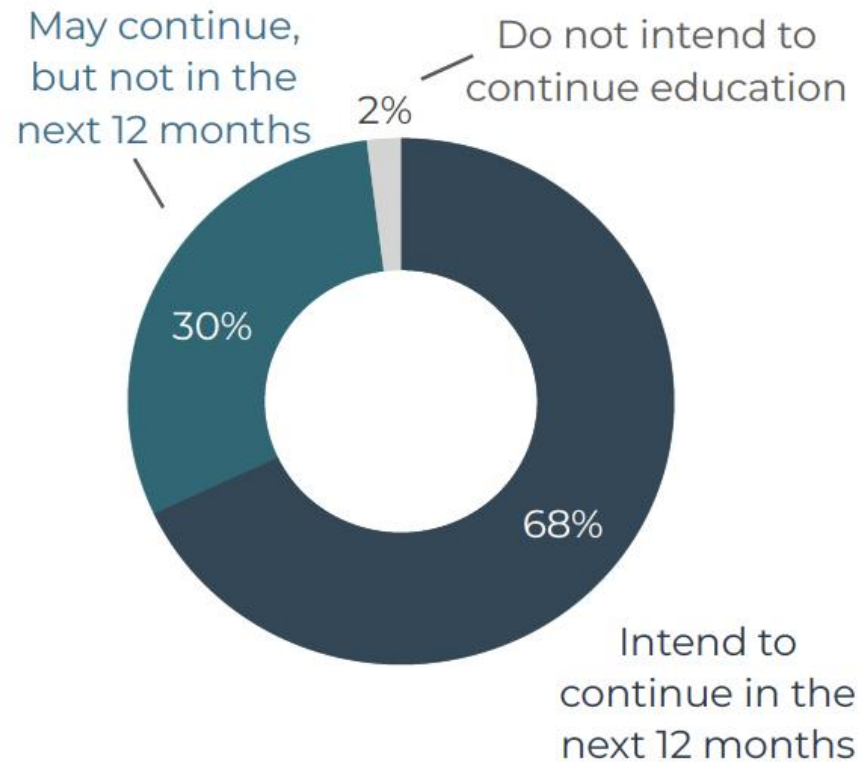
Insight #2

Non-completers see the value of continuing their education and intend to do so at a community college in the near future.

98% of non-completers
who plan to continue
their education intend
to do so at a community
college

NON-COMPLETERS PLAN TO CONTINUE EDUCATION

Non-Completers (n=253)



3 out of 5 non-completers plan to continue their community college education in the next 12 months

RECOMMENDATION

Develop targeted re-engagement and re-enrollment strategies that ease the burden on adult learners returning to college

“I would like to start going again. I wish there was a way to swing full-time parenting, full-time work, and schooling.”

- Single Parent, Non-Completer

CALIFORNIA RECONNECT

California Reconnect is a student-centered approach/initiative to re-engage learners who have some college, but have not yet earned a credential.

Participating institutions included:

- San Diego City College
- San Diego Mesa College
- San Diego Miramar College

CA RECONNECT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Personalized and Targeted Outreach
- Variety of Communication Formats
- Timely Outreach



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

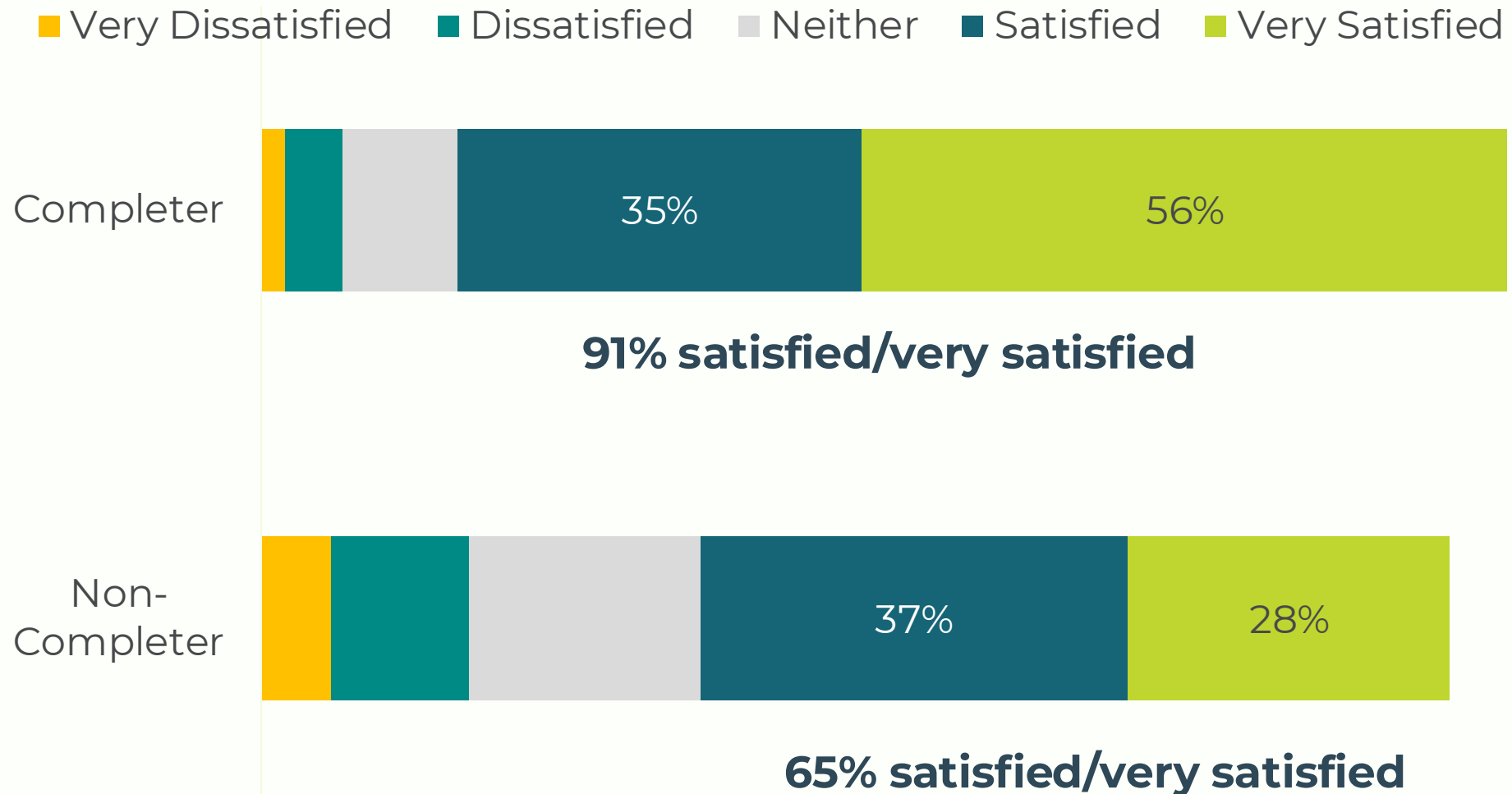
- What strategies are currently in place to re-engage students who have stopped out, and how is the college assessing the effectiveness of these efforts?
- How can colleges better communicate the re-enrollment process so that students know where and how to access help?
- How might the college collaborate with community partners to reach potential returners, share information about re-enrollment, or assist with navigation and support services?



Insight #3

Although overall satisfaction is high, completers are more likely than non-completers to view their education as a worthwhile investment and to report positive experiences.

COMPLETERS REPORT GREATER SATISFACTION



MORE COMPLETERS REPORTED POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

	% Strongly Agree/Agree	
	Completers (n=310)	Non-Completers (n=252)
My time at the community colleges was a worthwhile investment	93%*	69%
College staff treated me with respect	88%*	75%
My instructors cared about my success	85%*	67%
The college provided resources and opportunities that were accessible to me	85%*	69%
The college had a welcoming environment	85%*	69%
I felt connected to other students at the college	52%*	39%

Note. Sample sizes may vary slightly across items due to missing data. *Significantly higher than comparison group, $p < .05$

COMPLETERS MORE LIKELY TO ACCESS ACADEMIC SUPPORT

	Completers (n=304)	Non-Completers (n=249)
Library access	49%	43%
Academic support	43%*	29%
Financial assistance	38%	33%
Career center services	22%	21%
Services for specialized groups	13%	12%
Basic needs assistance	13%	13%
Health services	12%*	5%
Community-building activities	11%*	6%
Counseling services	9%	7%
English language support services	6%	4%
Child development center	4%	2%
None of the above	25%	28%

Academic support matters: Students who used these services were almost twice as likely to complete their education.

*Significantly higher than comparison group, $p < .05$

RECOMMENDATION

Provide adult learners with high-touch guidance that helps them navigate college systems and connect them with student support services

“I hope the schools are doing better at providing resources to students than what I received. I hope it is easier to access since I had a hard time.”

- BIPOC, Non-Completer



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How effectively does the college provide support services specific to adult learners?
- How is the college identifying gaps in support or measuring outcomes for adult learners?
- In what ways is the college building faculty and staff capacity around data literacy, cultural competence, and adult learning principles?



Insight #4

Adult learners who complete their educational goals not only perceive greater career benefits from their education, but also report higher earnings and stronger alignment between their training and employment.

Total Annual Gross Income by Completion Status

	Completers (n=259)	Non-Completers (n=218)
Less than \$40,000	41%	55%*
\$40,001 to \$60,000	19%	21%
\$60,001 to \$80,000	13%	10%
Over \$80,000	28%*	15%
*Significantly higher than comparison group, $p < .05$		

COMPLETERS PERCEIVED GREATER CAREER BENEFITS

Perceived Impact of Community College Education on Employment

	Completers (n=298)	Non-Completers (n=248)
Upskilled for current employment	35%*	19%
Found full-time employment	19%*	7%
Received a pay/wage increase	11%*	6%
Found part-time employment	9%	6%
Received a promotion	8%*	2%
Other	7%	8%
Started a business	5%	6%
No impact on employment	37%	58%*

Note. Multiple options could be selected. *Significantly higher than comparison group, $p < .05$

COMPLETERS SAW ALIGNMENT BETWEEN TRAINING & JOB

Employed in a Job Closely Related to Field of Study by Completion Status

	Completers (<i>n</i> =298)	Non-Completers (<i>n</i> =246)
Very Close	37%*	21%
Close	29%	25%
Not Close	34%	55%*

*Significantly higher than comparison group, *p*<.05

RECOMMENDATION

Strengthen pathways to high-demand, high-wage careers by **expanding access to career services that promote employment readiness and advancement**

“[It was helpful that the college’s] career services had unconventional hours for even part-time workers.”

- Person with disability, Completer

SIMILAR FINDINGS IN STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES STUDY

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES EXPERIENCES STUDY

MAY 2024



coeccc.net/san-diego-imperial/2024/05/student-support-services-experiences-study

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How does the college ensure that programs leading to high-wage, high-demand careers are accessible to adult learners?
- Are adult learners equitably represented across priority programs, or are they concentrated in only a few fields that accommodate their schedules?
- What creative strategies can community colleges adopt to increase adult learners' engagement with career services, particularly for those balancing work, family, and other responsibilities?

Summary of Insights



Insight #1

Adult learners balance multiple responsibilities—such as working and caregiving—resulting in scheduling conflicts that delay or stop their studies.



Insight #2

Non-completers see the value of continuing their education and intend to do so at a community college in the near future.



Insight #3

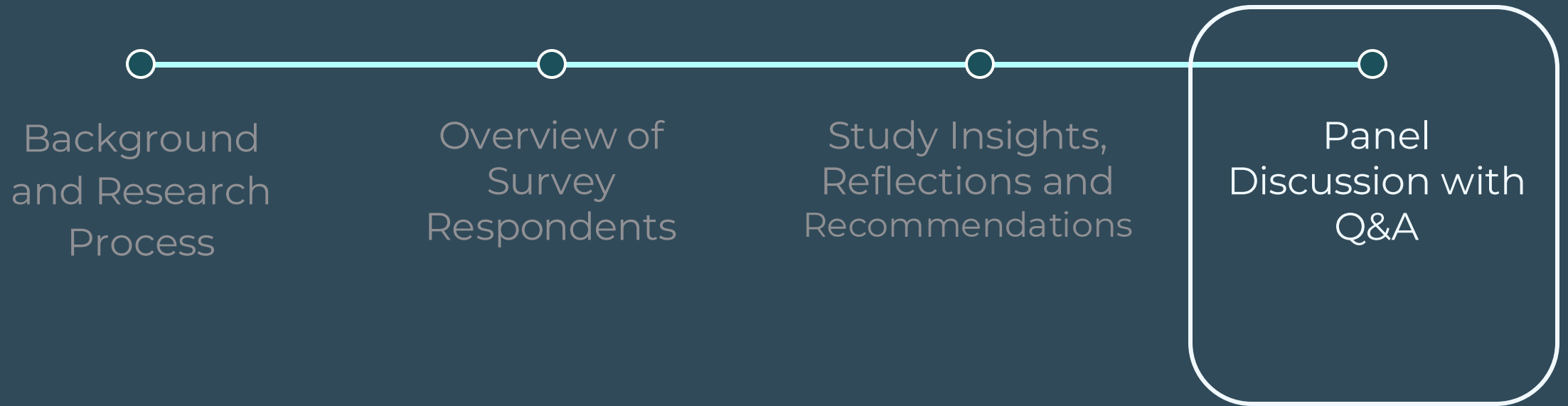
Although overall satisfaction is high, completers are more likely than non-completers to view their education as a worthwhile investment and to report positive experiences.



Insight #4

Adult learners who complete their educational goals not only perceive greater career benefits from their education, but also report higher earnings and stronger alignment between their training and employment.

AGENDA



PANELISTS



Alex Berry
San Diego
Mesa College



Candace Rose
Palomar
College



Randy Beach
Southwestern
College

DISCUSSION: REIMAGING THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

How is your college transforming to better serve adult learners?

Can you share an example—or something currently in progress—that removes a barrier and makes college more accessible for them?

DISCUSSION: FLEXIBLE LEARNING BY DESIGN

How is your college creating more flexible ways for adults to learn?

Have you made any changes to course formats or support services that help students balance school with other responsibilities?

DIRECT ASSESSMENT COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION

How do you expect your college's alternative credit-awarding methods to influence adult learners' willingness to pursue higher education?

What potential concerns and challenges are you addressing when guiding your college toward more flexible learning pathways for adult learners?

DISCUSSION: RE-ENGAGEMENT

How has your college and district reached out to students who have stopped out? What strategies or methods are you currently using or plan to use to re-engage students?

PANELISTS



Alex Berry
San Diego
Mesa College



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Palomar
College



Randy Beach
Southwestern
College

THANK YOU!

SLIDES



REPORT

